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TO: SECSTATE, WASHINGTON

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PART I

1. I called on Diem 15:30 May 2. He began conversation by saying government's action in daring establish order against Binh Xuyen had created profound effect on population. I asked him present situation Binh Xuyen. Diem did not reply directly but said five Binh Xuyen battalions had wished to rally with Binh Xuyen Chief of Staff Minh. Rallying should have taken place May 1 at 0600. During preceding several days, Diem's representatives had negotiated with Minh. Diem said Minh had broken with Bai Vien's chief lieutenants, claiming they were "instruments of colonialism." Development of hostilities had prevented this rallying from taking place on schedule. I asked Diem if it was true that Minh had been murdered. He said it was probably so, but he had no proof.

2. I asked Diem what the situation was in the city. I said I had reports indicating growing friction between Vietnamese and French, and I had been instructed by Washington to advise Diem against fostering anti-French propaganda and activities. Diem replied that French had brought many troops into Saigon, perhaps ten battalions. Vietnamese wonder why they are so numerous. I asked Diem what reply he made to this question. Again, he failed to answer directly and said that Binh Xuyen retained three posts in French zone. I asked how many Binh Xuyen were in French security area. He replied that they were not very

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numerous. Again, I urged Diem to prevent a build-up of anti-French feeling, which could serve no useful purpose. Diem said French must officially denounce French press stories regarding Vietnamese Government, which have caused "wide popular dissatisfaction." He added that Binh Xuyen zone south of Nhatrang Chiporne is not a political enclave and said that French officers enter and leave it at will. He feels each mission should be cleared in advance with him.

3. I said anti-French propaganda could end by creating worse situation than that brought about by hostilities with Binh Xuyen. I said Diem could not wish to provoke hostilities between FEC and his own army, which could be disastrous. Diem replied "his personal authority" over the army and people had made it possible so far avoid real trouble. Again I urged Diem to do everything in his power to relax present tensions. Diem said he had sent instructions to the provinces to prevent anti-French actions. I asked what he had done in this regard in Saigon. He said he had issued instructions to that effect to the army and Information Service.

4. I asked Diem what his plans and intentions were with respect to a new government. He said that until government recaptured police control from Binh Xuyen, no one was willing to enter Cabinet. He continued saying that there was wide and growing popular feeling against Bao Dai and that "Revolutionary Committee" was determined to unseat Chief of State who had "insolently" sent telegrams en clair regarding transfer of military powers to Vy. Diem said Generals The, Phuong and Ngo had told him Bao Dai was finished, and he also would be finished if he went along with Bao Dai. Diem said that the Revolutionary Committee had declared the FEC should withdraw, and that if a plebiscite

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were held, the people would vote that the FEC was more dangerous than the Viet Minh. I said to Diem that, in my opinion, if anti-French activity should lead to a withdrawal of the FEC, Viet Minh could take over all of Viet Nam. I asked Diem to stop and think carefully before embarking on a course which might lead to the premature evacuation of the FEC before any force was prepared to take its place. Once more I urged him to suppress anti-French agitation before it should get out of hand.

5. Diem said he had asked to have a draft communique prepared recommending that the people avoid anti-French excesses, but before any such declaration could be published, the French would have to disown French journalists unfriendly to government and remove remaining Binh Xuyen posts from French security zone. Otherwise, he said such a declaration would unleash popular feeling against himself.

6. Diem said again that Revolutionary Committee believes Bao Dai's authority should be removed and that Diem should transfer his powers to people (i.e. the Revolutionary Committee) which would ask Diem form new government. I commented that, in my view, such a proposal was extremely dangerous and asked what authority the Revolutionary Committee could have for taking such action.

7. Diem evaded the question and said that a meeting of National Army officers had resolved not to obey Inspector General Vy but only Chief of Staff Ty. Diem said the officers would defer to a "government of the people" but not Bao Dai. He added that the Committee will have a mass meeting May 3 or 4 to depose Bao Dai. Meeting is expected to recommend establishment of provisional government to continue until general elections are held.

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8. Diem ~~said~~ suggested US Government ~~might~~ recommend to Bao Dai to resign his powers in favor of Diem, since in any case ~~he~~ Bao Dai is finished. I told Diem I would report his views to my government. Meanwhile, I recommended that he look ahead and consider the complex problems which such action by Revolutionary Committee would pose. I said I believed the US Government could not and would not recommend to Bao Dai that he resign his powers. I gave as my strong view that only general elections and a National Assembly could determine the ultimate form of the Vietnamese Government. Please advise whether Department concurs or issue appropriate instructions

PART II

1. Following interview with Diem reported above I called on Ely. I gave brief resume of Washington consultations and summarized messages contained in recent instructions. I told Ely I had just seen Diem to whom I had stressed that he should do all possible to avert a buildup of anti-French feeling. Ely interrupted and said that in his view Diem is entirely responsible for the current wave of anti-French sentiment which he is doing everything possible to encourage. I said that Diem told me he was having prepared a statement designed to discourage anti-French sentiment but that he felt it could not be made because of (a) French press stories which aggravating Revolutionary Committee and Army, (b) French comings and goings in and out of Binh Xuyen zone without reference to Vietnamese Government, and (c) continued existence of three Binh Xuyen posts in French Security Zone. Ely replied that French contacts with Binh Xuyen had succeeded in keeping peace for three weeks and that Vietnamese Army had asked more often than not that contacts be made. Ely denied that contacts now exist except with respect to evacuation of dead and wounded. He said that Binh Xuyen occupying posts in French Zone were free to leave if they wish but that FEC would not be used to expel them.

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2. I told Ely that Diem had said National Army has "occupied ruins of Binh Xuyen Headquarters beyond "E" bridge and that Binh Xuyen have been driven out of metropolitan area except for three posts mentioned above. Ely commented that Bay Vien is now in process of going underground. I said I had reports that Bay Vien had been wounded. Ely said he had no information but could inquire through Gambies.

3. I told Ely that Diem said he felt that Army and bulk of population were with him. Ely scoffed at that claim, saying neither the Army nor the Revolutionary Committee was with Diem. In fact he said Diem is now surrounded by all the elements that are needed to assassinate him. I said that fact remained that Army had refused to follow Vy despite Bao Dai's order. If Army was against Diem, why had it followed this course? Ely would not make direct reply but said that it is a particularly sinister development that Trinh Minh The is now serving in effect, as Diem's military advisor. In lieu of a government, which he cannot form, Diem is relying on Revolutionary Committee which is composed of Generals The, Phuong and Ngo together with other elements either worthless of dangerous, outstanding among whom is Committee's Vice President, Son, a former Viet Minh. Ely said that in his view, to protect himself from Bao Dai, Diem has resorted to revolutionary elements which may end by using and destroying him. I asked Ely if he had proof of Viet Minh penetration of Committee. Ely said that for first time beginning (ago) a month his services felt Viet Minh are trying to take advantage of present situation. Certain evidence contained in Viet Minh telegrams now being deciphered, regarding contents of which Ely agreed inform me. I reiterated that we were anxious to have facts regarding Viet Minh activity. Ely said that presence of Son was an element of proof, however Viet Minh are clever and do not make identification of their adherents easy. He said that Viet Minh directives

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are now taking new course indicating a degree of active participation in development of events in Saigon which did not exist a month ago. He said that new elements had been detected in Saigon which seem allied to Trinh Minh The ~~during truce~~ when latter was engaged in active terrorism. He said that Trinh Minh The's present political themes are similar to those of Viet Minh in being anti-Bao Dai and anti-colonialist.

4. I asked Ely who would completely support the Binh Xuyen posts in French Security Zone if Binh Xuyen driven from Saigon-Cholon area. He replied that the French would not do so. I asked if he could help to remove them peacefully from the scene. Ely said that Gambiez was now taking up this question with Bay Vien who may however ask for some good quid pro quo, particularly since he had been "attacked during truce." I commented that it was hard to determine who had started recent hostilities. Ely replied that he was convinced that Diem was one hundred percent responsible and added that he did not wish discuss details.

5. Ely said that in his view the present burning questions are (a) how Diem is going to deal with the Revolutionary Committee and (b) how Diem is going to find a new government. He said that he failed to see a solution to either question, both of which had arisen, in large measure ~~during~~ to lack of common Franco-US policy.

6. I asked Ely if he believed leaders invited by Bao Dai would go to Cannes. Ely said he did not know who had been invited but that everyone was frightened. Quat for example has approached French for protection as one of the directives of the Viet Minh is to eliminate Dai Viet leaders. I said that I believed crux of the problem was the loyalty of the Army. If Diem had this he will remain in power for sometime. If Diem refuses to go to Cannes, Bao Dai will probably attempt to replace him, but again the Army may decide outcome. Ely

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said that we are now in a revolutionary phase. He believes pro-Viet Minh or even Viet Minh cadres may soon appear openly in the Army, possibly under the aegis of Trinh Minh The. I asked what evidence French had of alleged Trinh Minh The connection with Viet Minh. Van Luethem volunteered following elements (not in themselves conclusive): (a) Viet Minh directives, (b) increasing number in Saigon of persons, including terrorists, associated in past with Trinh Minh The, and (c) number of persons in entourage of Diem and Revolutionary Committee having Viet Minh history. He agreed to furnish data to substantiate above.

7. I asked Ely what would be reaction of Bao Dai and French if Revolutionary Committee attempted to oust Bao Dai. Ely replied that he could not speak for Bao Dai and that he did not know what French policy was following breakdown of our joint position. He added that he believed this breakdown dated from unilateral US approach to Bao Dai to support recommendations being carried by Luyen from Diem. He countered by asking what US position was with respect to Bao Dai. I replied that our position is one of non-interference with Vietnamese domestic affairs. He asked what US position would be if Revolutionary Committee attempted overthrow Bao Dai. I replied that I could not say but would inform department of this possibility. I added that my consultation in Washington reinforced my earlier conviction that both Congress and press feel that head of legal government is acting against a purely private and selfish organization, the Binh Xuyen. If Diem is overthrown as result of Binh Xuyen action, US financial support to Vietnam may be forfeited.

8. This conversation was cut off by arrival Malcolm MacDonald for call on Ely.

9. I hope within next 24-48 hrs, after I have had opportunity for contact Bao, Diem and others, to give my evaluation of situation with appropriate recommendations.

KIDDER

PJSturmsemiev
May 2, 1955

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